

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 13 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 24, wherein said nitrogen compound is selected from the group consisting of ammonia, ammonium hydroxide, hydroxylamine, alkanolamines, alkylamines and mixtures thereof.

Claim 14 (Currently Amended): The process according to Claim 24, wherein said nitrogen compound is selected from the group consisting of ammonia, ammonium hydroxide, ~~mono-ethanolamine~~ monoethanolamine and ~~di-ethanolamine~~ diethanolamine.

Claim 15 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 24, wherein the acid monomer component is neutralized with said nitrogen compound up to a neutralization level of from 10 to 100%.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 24, wherein monomers based on acrylic acid, methacrylic acid or derivatives of these carboxylic acids are subjected to polymerization.

Claim 18 (Currently Amended): The process of Claim 24, wherein said ~~partially water-soluble monomer~~ comonomer is vinyl acetate.

Claim 19 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 24, wherein at least one crosslinker based on a bi- or polyfunctional monomer is used in addition.

Claim 20 (Currently Amended): The process according to Claim 24, wherein the polymer or copolymer product is heated at a temperature of from 140 to 180°C.

Claim 21 (Currently Amended): The process according to Claim 24, wherein the water-soluble or water-swellaable polymer or copolymer has ~~polymer products having a~~ content of residual monomer of less than 50 ppm ~~are formed~~.

Claim 22 (Currently Amended): The process according to Claim 24, wherein the water-soluble or water-swellaable polymer or copolymer has ~~polymer products having a~~ content of residual monomer of less than 30 ppm ~~are formed~~.

Claim 23 (Currently Amended): The process according to Claim 24, wherein the water-soluble or water-swellaable polymer or copolymer has ~~polymer products having a~~ residual content of acrylamide of less than 10 ppm ~~are formed~~.

Claim 24 (Currently Amended): A process for producing a water-soluble or water-swellaable polymer or copolymer comprising, providing an acid monomer or monomers alone, or with a comonomer or comonomers; partially or completely neutralizing said monomer or monomers with a basic nitrogen compound or compounds; free-radical polymerizing said monomer or monomers alone, or with comonomer or comonomers to ~~for~~ form said water-soluble or water-swellaable polymer or copolymer, wherein said free-radical polymerizing is started at a temperature of from 0 to 50°C and is performed in aqueous solution at a maximum temperature of no more than 102-104°C, to provide an aqueous polymer or copolymer solution or an aqueous polymer or copolymer gel; and, subsequent to completion

of said free-radical polymerizing step, heating said water-soluble or water-swellaable polymer or copolymer at a temperature of from 120 to 240°C.

Claim 25 (Currently Amended): The process according to Claim 24, wherein said nitrogen compound is selected from the group consisting of ammonia, ammonium hydroxide, aliphatic mono- and polyamines, cycloaliphatic mono- and polyamines, aromatic mono- and polyamines, ~~heterocyclic~~ heterocyclic amines, hydroxylamine and alkanolamines.

Claim 26 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 24, wherein said monomer or monomers are acrylic acid, methacrylic acid, maleic acid, fumaric acid, itaconic acid, vinyl sulfonic acid or acrylamidopropanesulfonic acid.

Claim 27 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 24, wherein said comonomer or comonomers are acrylonitrile, methacrylonitrile, N,N-dimethylacryl amide, vinylpyrrolidone, vinylpyridine, vinyl acetate, hydroxyl group-containing esters of polymerizable acids, amino group-containing and ammonium group-containing esters and amides of polymerizable acids, C₁-C₁₀ alcohol esters of acrylic and/or methacrylic acid or esters of acrylic and/or methacrylic acid with styrene or alkylated styrene.

Claim 28 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 24, wherein said heating is carried out for a time period between 10 minutes and 2 hours.

Claim 29 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 20, wherein said heating is carried out for a time period between 10 minutes and 1 hour.

Claim 30 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 24, wherein said heating is carried out for a time period between 10 minutes and 1 hour.

Claim 31 (Previously Presented): The process according to Claim 20, wherein said heating is carried out for a time period between 10 minutes and 2 hours.

Claim 32 (New): The process according to Claim 24, wherein said free radical polymerization is started at a temperature of from 5 to 25°C.

Claim 33 (New): The process according to Claim 24, wherein the polymer or copolymer is heated at a temperature of 160°C or 180°C.